DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 525 IR 013 050

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TITLE The Influence of Nonverbal Behavior on Person Perception in Television Interviews.
PUB DATE Jul 86
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the International Television Studies Conference (London, England, July 10-12, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aggression; *Audience Analysis; Foreign Countries; Influences; Interviews; *Mass Media; *Nonverbal Communication; *Opinions; Semantics; *Social Behavior; Television Research; Television Viewing; Videotape Recordings
IDENTIFIERS *West Germany

ABSTRACT

A controlled experiment was conducted to test the extent to which nonverbal behavior between a journalist and a politician in a televised interview influences the way in which they are perceived by a television audience. Nine test films were produced that showed different versions of an interview in which the participants exhibited aggressive or defensive behavior. A video version of each of the nine test films was shown to a group of 25 students. Two hundred and twenty-five students participated and assessed their perceptions of the journalist and politician with a semantic differential instrument consisting of 18 seven-step scales. Results showed that the nonverbal behavior of the participants influenced the way in which they were perceived by both the television viewers and their conversation partners. Based on these findings, it was concluded that one conversation partner in a television interview can influence the social behavior of the other by changing his own behavior; and that the nonverbal behavior of the conversation partner in a television interview cannot be seen as a well-defined set of stimuli whose effects are developed independently of the effects of the behavioral context. (17 references, 1 figure, 3 tables) (CGD)

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THE INFLUENCE OF NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR ON PERSON PERCEPTION IN TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

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Paper Presented to the 1986 International Television Studies Conference

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THE INFLUENCE OF NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR ON PERSON PERCEPTION IN TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

Abstract

The influence of nonverbal behavior of a journalist and a politician in televised interviews on the perception of the interluctors were tested in a controlled experiment. Test material were nine versions of the interview in which the interluctors showed aggressive or defensive behavior. Person perception was measured by a semantic differential of eighteen scales. Factor analysis resulted in a three-factor solution which referred to social behavior, resoluteness and qualification of the interluctors. Two-way-analysis of variance demonstrated that defensive behavior conveyed a positive impression of the social behavior, but a negative impression of the qualification and resoluteness of the actors. Secondly, the nonverbal behavior of the actor influenced the perception of his interluctor when his behavior was held constant. This effect was especially salient in the perception of his social behavior.

Television interviews are staged conversations meant to influence a third party, the viewer. Both participants may seek different objectives and may use verbal and nonverbal methods. Several questions arise in this context: Are there especially effective conversational strategies? Are there strategies equally effective in all conversational situations? Do the strategies have the same effect for all participants? Here, we are dealing with questions of classical rhetoric (Aristotle 1980; Ballweg 1982; Perelman 1958; Lausberg 1960), the central difference being that an interviewer steps in between rhetor and audience. The relationship between rhetor and audience becomes one between interviewer and interviewee before an audience. This situation may influence the participants to attain the support of the audience at the disadvantage of their respective opponents.

Although interviews constitute a major portion of television reporting, the effects of various conversational strategies - especially those in the nonverbal spectrum - have seldom been researched. Several mass communication studies on the verbal statements of politicians in television interviews do exist (see Berens 1975; Ecker et al. 1977; Giedt 1955; Hoffman 1982); analyses of the effects of nonverbal behavior may more often be found in psychological literature.

In this context, two approaches are especially relevant, excluding the studies done on deceptive behavior (see Johnston 1956; Maier 1965; Comadena 1982; Miller et al. 1983).

One approach deals with the effects of each participant's behavior on the other, while the second deals with the influence of the participant's behavior on audience perception. In respect to the first approach, studies on the influence of conversional content on nonverbal behavior and studies on the influence of nonverbal behavior on content (in the broadest sense) may be distinguished.

Exline, Gray and Schuette (1965) analyzed the influence of conversational content and situations on eye contact. They assumed that frequent glances at one's conversation partner signaled a willingness to communicate and that less frequent glances signaled an avoidance of contact (see also Daly and Stafford). Using this assumption as a point of departure for an experiment, the researchers found that people who are asked embarrassing questions in an interview look at their partner less often than persons who are to answer less tricky questions. Women generally look at their conversation partner more often than men. This behavior is manifested especially when a person himself is speaking, may be observed less often when a person is listening.

Ellsworth and Carlsmith (1968) researched the influence of visual behavior and of conversational content on the evaluation of one's conversation partner. The authors assumed that visual behavior ist not (only) a reaction to verbal statements; rather, it becomes a source for content-related positions on the part of the listener. Interviewees judge an interviewer who glances at them often better than one who seldom mantains eye contact, given a conversation that has run positively for the interviewee. Secondly, interviewees judge an interviewer who has maintained such eye contact more negatively than an interviewer who has looked at them less often, given a conversation that has been less successful for the interviewee in terms of content. The interpretation of the interview itself takes a similar turn. In other words, eye contact has an influence on the evaluation of one's conversation partner. The direction this influence takes depends on the content of the conversation, however.

After a positive conversation with little eye contact, the interviewer and the interview are judged in a similarly negative manner as after a negative conversation with much eye contact.

The experiments of Exline, Gray and Schuette, as well as Ellsworth and Carlsmith's work pointed toward a possible unconscious and unintentional influence of one's verbal and

nonverbal behavior on the verbal and nonverbal behavior of one's conversation partner. They thus indirectly and without reference confirmed older studies on the Experimenter-Effect, which showed that the expectations of the experimenter unconsciously affected the reactions of the experimentees. The above described experiments, however, fail to inform us on the influence of the modification of behavior on the passive spectator. Two studies by Imada and Hakel as well as work by Burgoon, Buller, Hale and deTruck may figure as examples for this research approach.

Imada and Hakel (1977) examined the influence gestures and facial expressions of an applicant had on her evaluation. They instructed a confederate to play the applicant's role in two different versions. In the open version, the "actress" smiled, established eye contact often, addressed the interviewer, etc. In the closed version, the "actress" seldom smiled, avoided eye contact and turned away from the interviewer. In both versions, the "actress" gave the same answers to the standardized set of questions used by her interview partner, such that only her nonverbal behavior differed. The authors found that persons with open gestures and facial expressions are judged more favorably (more qualified, more motivated and more successful) - aside from their verbal statements - than persons with closed gestures and facial expressions. The form in which the experiment was presented (direct observation or viewing of a film) showed no significant influence on the evaluation of the applicant.

Burgoon, Buller, Hale and deTruck (1984) went a considerable step further in systematically varying five different behaviors, and determining their influence on the evaluation of the relationships between two conversation partners. The five modes of behavior were: eye contact, proximity, body lean, smiling and touch. Each of these modes of behavior was simulated in two extrems by each of the conversation partners who acted as models for the experiment; large and small distance, seeking and avoidance of touch, forward and backward body lean, much and little eye contact, and a smiling and a non-smiling facial expression.

In sum, the authors noted that the distance between conversation partners had the greatest influence on the perception of their relationship, ahead of facial expression and eye contact; close proximity and frequent eye contact had similar effects on the viewer. The combination of two modes of behavior with similar effects reinforced the viewer's impression; the addition of a third mode of behavior - with the same or contrary effect - barely influenced the total picture, however. The perception of the conversational situation only changed when two modes of behavior with a contrary effect were added.

The experiments of Imada and Hakel as well as those performed by Burgoon, Buller, Hale and deTruck demonstrated that the nonverbal behavior of a conversation partner has

an influence on his evaluation by a third party. Strictly speaking, by researching the reactions of third parties, the authors no longer analyzed private conversations, but rather public interviews - although this had not actually been addressed in the studies. At the same time, however, they neglected the social character of conversations in that they varied the behavior of one partner, but kept the behavior of the other partner the same. In longer interviews especially, the behavior of both partners seldom remains the same throughout. A partner can begin an interview on a defensive bent and become aggressive or vice-versa. Additionally, the behavior of a partner can change from aggressive to defensive. Parallel changes of behavior are possible also - for example, if both partners begin their conversations defensively, but end it aggressively. In each case, one would expect the change in behavior as well as the behavioral content would have an influence on the perception of the interview partners.

Assuming that aggressive behavior is perceived as a faux pas by the general public, and that two conversation partners in a television interview are perceived together, the following assumptions may be made:

1. In a television interview, defensive modes of behavior are generally evaluated more positively than aggressive modes of behavior.

2. In a television interview, the perception of one conversation partner is influenced by the behavior of the other.

Both assumptions will be examined in an experiment in which the behavior of two interview partners will be varied independent of one another.

Research Method

Nine test films which showed different versions of an interview were produced for the experiment (see figure 1). A journalist and a politician, portrayed by semi-professional actors, were conversation partners. The interview was composed of five questions and answers. The first three questions remained the same in all versions of the interview. Both conversation partners took a neutral stance. In the remaining questions and answers, the nonverbal behavior of the conversation partners was varied. In one version, they conducted themselves aggressively throughout, in another they conducted themselves defensively throughout, and in a third, they took on a neutral stance. Through editing, further dynamics of interaction were compiled.

For the first three questions and answers, the camera showed both conversation partners at a distance of three meters, in a half-pan. The two following questions and answers were recorded with two cameras. Each showed a speaker from a distance of 2,50 meters, in a closeup. The cultural policy of an unnamed city was the subject of the interview. The content of the conversation partners' statements was the same in all versions. The statements were worded slightly differently in each version to make the individual versions more believable.

Three basic versions, that showed the journalist and the politician in an aggressive, neutral or defensive stance for the course of the interview, as well as six versions in which the journalist or the politician may be observed as consistently dominant, opposing or intimidated, were selected for the analysis.

The conversation partners were seen as dominating if they conducted themselves aggressively throughout a conversation opposite a partner who conducted himself defensively. They were evaluated as opposing if they behaved defensively initially and reacted to aggressive behavior with their own aggressiveness. The partners were described as intimidated if they behaved aggressively initially and switched over to defensive behavior after an aggressive rebuff (figure 1).

- Figure 1 here -

A video version of each of the nine test films was presented to a group of 25 people. 225 students participated in the test. Immediately following the presentation of the test films, the perception of the journalist and the politician were measured, with a semantic differential consisting of 18 seven-step scales. In the analysis of the data, the scales were interpreted in such a manner that low values always indicated negative, high values always indicated positive qualities.

Results

The results of the study are analyzed in three steps: In the first step, the dimensions in which the journalist and the politician are perceived, are determined. In the second step, the influence of both persons as well as their dynamic of interaction on the perception of the journalist and the politician are determined. For this step in the analysis, a two-way analysis of variance of the in-sum perception as well the impression on the individual dimensions of perception is conducted. In the third step, the influence of the behaviour of one conversation partner on the perception of individual qualities of the other conversation partner are analyzed. The perception of each conversation partner in various film versions is contrasted with t-tests.

Dimensions of perception

The journalist and the politician were perceived in the same dimension. A factor analysis of the assessments appearing in the 18 scales led, in both cases, to a three-factor solution that accounts for 59 percent of the variance respectively. The three dimensions of perception pertain to the "social behavior", "qualification" and "resoluteness" of the journalist and the politician. Aside from one exception (impressive - dull), all scales in both factor analyses were assigned the same dimension. Table 1 shows the results of both factor analyses.

- Table 1 here -

On the basis of the factor analysis, three new variables for the evaluation of the journalist and the politician were created: "social behavior", "qualification" and "resoluteness". The appropriate scales of the semantic differential, weighted with their respective factor loadings were listed additionally here.
These three dimensions of evaluation enter the following step in the analysis as dependent variables.

The Influence of the Person and the Dynamic of Interaction on the Perception of the Journalist and the Politician

The impression that the social behavior of the journalist and the politician left with the viewer was dependent on the dynamic of interaction, and not on the personality of each of the conversation partners (main effect of the dynamic of interaction, not a main effect of the two persons). The social behavior of both persons was evaluated the same way - independent of the dynamic of interaction. Consistently defensive behavior - independent of the conversation partners - led to a better impression of their social behavior than consistently aggressive behavior.

Further, significant interrelationships between the persons and the dynamic of interaction (effects of interaction) existed. In this vein, the social behavior of the antagonistic politician was perceived relatively favorable, while the social behavior of the antagonistic journalist was interpreted fairly unfavorably. The social behavior of the dominating politician, on the other hand, was judged more negatively than the social behavior of the dominating journalist. The test group allowed the politician, but not the journalist to defend himself as aggressively as his opponent after an aggressive rhetorical attack. The audience disapproved of the politician's aggressive behavior more than of the journa-

list's when he conducted himself continually aggressively opposite a consistently defensive conversation partner. The mean values are lower than those one would expect from an unweighted analysis, as the scale values were weighted with the factor loadings in order to balance their actual importance for the perception of the social behaviour.

- Table 2 here -

The impression of the resoluteness of the journalist and the politician was dependent on the individual person as well as the dynamic of interaction of both conversation partners (main effect of the person and the dynamic of interaction). The test-group - independent of the dynamic of interaction - generally held the journalist for more resolute than the politician. Both persons appeared more resolute if they conducted themselves consistently or increasingly aggressivly, for example, opposite an intimidated conversation partner. They made a relatively good impression in the neutral version as well. Furthermore, significant interaction existed between the individuals and the dynamic of interaction of the conversation partners. The consistently defensive journalist was seen as considerably more resolute than the consistently defensive politician. In other words, the journalist even seemed resolute when he took on the de-

fensive stance - for example, opposite a dominant politician. The politician seemed resolute only when he became aggressive - for example opposite an intimidated journalist.

The impression of the qualification of the journalist and the politician was dependent on both the individual and the dynamic of interaction (main effect of the individual and the dynamic of interaction). The test group saw the journalist as more qualified than the politician - regardless of the respective dynamic of interaction. Both individuals seemed a bit more qualified when they were consistently aggressive than when they took the defensive side. Aside from this, no significant effects of interaction between the individuals and the dynamic of interaction (see table 2) were produced.

Influences of one Interview Partner on the Perception of the other Interview Partner

The influence of one interview partner on the perception of the other was researched on the basis of selected film versions. For this purpose, two film versions, in which one interview partner conducted himself the same, the other interview partner, however, conducted himself differently, were produced. The evaluation of one interview partner is not contrasted with the evaluation of another, as in the earlier mentioned analysis, however. Rather, the evaluations of one interview partner who shows the same behavior in two versions are compared while his partner behaves differently. As the interview partner appearing first in both of the films behaves the same, one would expect that he would be perceived similarly. This is not the case.

If the journalist acted consistently defensively in two versions, and the politician - on the other hand - acted consistently defensive once, consistently aggressive another time, then the journalist received higher marks for his social behavior and qualification in the second version. The journalist's resoluteness received lower marks than in the first version, however. The journalist seemed more reserved, more likeable, more peaceable, fairer, and less overbearing (social behaviour); more honest and more conscientious (qualification) when the politician took on consistently

aggressive behaviour in contrast to the journalist's. In this situation, the journalist seemed inferior and less secure, however.

A contrast-effect appeared, which was especially noticeable in the judgement of the social behaviour of the individuals. As a result of the aggressive behavior of the politician, the identical social behavior of the journalist was perceived especially positively in both cases. The negative judgements on the resoluteness of the journalist conversing with a consistently aggressive politician can be seen in terms of this contrast-effect as well: As a result of the aggressive behavior of the politician, the journalist appeared less resolute. If the politician conducted himself continually aggressively in two versions while the journalist, on the other hand, used consistently aggressive behavior in one version and consistently defensive behavior in another, the resoluteness of the politician received lower marks in the latter version than in the former. The politician appeared importunate, less polite, more aggressive, less fair and more overbearing (social behavior), less competent and less honest (qualification), as well as more awkward, weaker, duller and tenser (resoluteness) if the journalist - in contrast to him - took the consistently defensive tack.
One can speak of a contrast effect here, too - especially in reference to social behavior. As a result of the defen-

sive behavior of the journalist, the social behavior of the politician - which was the same in both situations - was perceived more negatively. In contrast to the preceeding example, however, the negative perception of the resoluteness of the politician may not be interpreted as a contrast-effect. This would only have been possible if an aggressive politician in conversation with the defensive journalist had made a more resolute impression.

The comparison of the perception of one conversation partner given varying behavior of the other leads to the following result: The perception of the aggressive journalist and the perception of the defensive politician were independent on the perception of their conversation partners. The perception of the defensive journalist and the perception of the aggressive politician, on the other hand, were influenced markedly by the perception of the behavior of their conversation partners. This held especially for the evaluation of their social behavior, and, with certain exceptions, for the evaluation of their resoluteness. These results are shown in table 3. The scales are organized on the basis of the factor analysis for the journalist.

- Table 3 here -

Summary

The nonverbal behavior of the journalist and of the politician influenced their perception by the television viewer. Defensive behavior conveyed a positive impression of social behavior, but a negative impression of the qualification and the resoluteness of the actors. Aggressive behavior brought on exactly the opposite reaction; it transported a negative impression of the social behavior, but a positive impression of the resoluteness and qualification of the actors. A dilemma results for the participants. They must decide what they would like accentuated: a positive impression of their social behavior or a positive impression of their qualification and resoluteness.

Secondly, the nonverbal behavior of the journalist and the politician influenced the perception of their conversation partners. The journalist and the politician, respectively, were perceived differently when they conducted themselves the same and their conversation partners behaved differently. This effect was especially salient in the perception of their social behavior. If the journalist or the politician took on an aggressive stance, they conveyed a more positive picture of their conversation partner's social behavior. If they took on the defensive stance, however, the social behavior of their conversation partners was interpreted more negatively.

From this point of departure, two conclusions follow:

First, in a television interview, one conversation partner can influence the social behavior of the other, by changing his own behavior. He can cause a defensive partner to appear more positive through aggressive behavior, and cause an aggressive partner to appear more negative through defensive behavior.

Secondly, the nonverbal behavior of the conversation partners in a television interview cannot be seen as a well-defined set of stimuli whose effects are developed independently of the effects of the behavioral context. It must rather be assumed that the same behavior or stimuli have different effects - at least under certain conditions and in different conversational situations.

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Figure 1: Film versions and their characteristics

VERSIONS				CHARACTERISTICS
Question 4 Journalist	Answer 4 Politician	Question 5 Journalist	Answer 5 Politician .	
defensive	defensive	defensive	defensive	corresponding caution
defensive	aggressive	defensive	aggressive	dominating politician
defensive	aggressive	aggressive	defensive	intimidated politician
defensive	aggressive	aggressive	aggressive	opposing journalist
neutral	neutral	neutral	neutral	corresponding neutrality
aggressive	defensive	aggressive	defensive	dominating journalist
aggressive	defensive	aggressive	aggressive	opposing politician
aggressive	aggressive	defensive	aggressive	intimidated journalist
aggressive	aggressive	aggressive	aggressive	corresponding aggressiveness

Table 1: Factor analysis of the overall impression of the politician and journalist

		Journalist			Politician		
		Social behavior	Qualifi-cation	Resolute-ness	Social behavior	Qualifi-cation	Resolute-ness
polite	- impolite	0.79	0.02	0.10	0.79	-0.04	0.11
reserved	- importunate	0.76	-0.02	-0.15	0.73	-0.21	-0.03
peaceable	- aggressive	0.76	-0.11	-0.12	0.88	-0.14	-0.09
domineering	- submissive	-0.68	-0.06	0.25	-0.71	0.36	0.18
fair	- unfair	0.61	0.41	0.09	0.63	-0.05	0.29
likeable	- unlikeable	0.53	0.53	0.16	0.62	-0.00	0.28
conscientious	- casual	0.07	0.66	0.25	0.35	0.15	0.56
substantial	- insignificant	-0.09	0.64	0.32	0.14	0.27	0.70
committed	- uninvolved	-0.52	0.58	0.08	-0.32	0.24	0.48
competent	- incompetent	0.02	0.56	0.37	0.11	0.39	0.47
honest	- dishonest	0.06	0.52	0.02	0.36	0.00	0.46
secure	- insecure	-0.18	0.14	0.65	-0.29	0.75	0.15
skillful	- unskillful	0.16	0.30	0.65	0.00	0.65	0.05
strong	- weak	-0.34	0.23	0.65	-0.23	0.69	0.32
superior	- inferior	-0.22	-0.03	0.56	-0.29	0.74	0.06
calm	- tense	0.11	0.22	0.50	-0.07	0.51	0.19
impressive	- dull	-0.37	0.50	0.49	-0.15	0.39	0.53
professional	- neophyte	0.18	0.42	0.48	0.05	0.61	0.28
Declared share of variance (in percent)		28.7	22.1	8.4	30.2	22.8	7.2

Table 2: The influence of the person and his behavior on the impression of the conversation partners

- 2-way analysis of variance; weighted middle-range values -

Characteristics	Versions				Social Behavior*		Qualification**		Resoluteness***	
	J	K	J	K	J	K	J	K	J	K
corresponding caution	def	def	def	def	2.1	2.5	2.3	1.7	3.2	1.7
dominating politician	def	agg	def	agg	2.8	0.4	2.5	1.8	2.8	2.3
intimidating politician	def	agg	agg	def	1.3	2.1	2.5	1.7	3.2	1.9
opposing journalist	def	agg	agg	agg	1.6	1.3	2.6	2.2	3.1	2.9
corresponding neutrality	neu	neu	neu	neu	2.2	2.1	2.3	2.1	2.9	3.0
dominating journalist	agg	def	agg	def	1.1	2.9	2.5	1.7	3.2	1.5
opposing politician	agg	def	agg	agg	0.9	2.4	2.6	1.8	3.1	2.2
intimidating journalist	agg	agg	def	agg	2.0	0.7	2.5	1.8	2.6	2.7
corresponding aggressiveness	agg	agg	agg	agg	1.4	1.2	2.7	2.0	2.8	2.9
Total middle-range value					1.7	1.7	2.5	1.9	3.0	2.3
Main effect version					$F = 18.48$ $p < 0.0001$		$F = 3.02$ $p < 0.003$		$F = 4.93$ $p < 0.01$	
Main effect of person					$F = 0.00$ $p < 0.96$		$F = 139.07$ $p < 0.0001$		$F = 78.29$ $p < 0.0001$	
Interaction					$F = 43.16$ $p < 0.01$		$F = 1.57$ $p < 0.134$		$F = 10.82$ $p < 0.0001$	

* Sum of the 6 scales of the factor "social behavior", weighted with their loadings
** Sum of the 5 scales of the factor "qualification", weighted with their loadings
*** Sum of the 7 scales of the factor "resoluteness", weighted with their loadings

Table 3: The influence of the behavior of one conversation partner on the perception of the other

- Middle-range values -

		Journalist				Politician			
Journalist		def	def	agg	agg	def	agg	def	agg
Politician		def	agg	def	agg	def	def	agg	agg
Journalist		def	def	agg	agg	def	agg	def	agg
Politician		def	agg	def	agg	def	def	agg	agg
reserved	- importunate	4.4	5.2					2.2	3.0
polite	- impolite					5.0	5.9	1.9	3.6
likeable	- unlikeable	4.4	5.8						
peaceable	- aggressive	3.7	5.6					1.5	2.9
fair	- unfair	4.8	6.0					2.2	3.6
overbearing	- submissive	4.2	3.6					6.2	5.5
competent	- incompetent							3.5	4.4
honest	- dishonest	5.0	5.9					2.9	4.0
substantial	- insignificant								
uninvolved	- committed								
conscientious	- casual	4.2	5.1						
superior	- inferior	5.1	4.2	5.6	3.8				
secure	- insecure	5.8	4.7						
professional	- neophyte								
skillful	- unskillful							3.1	4.4
strong	- weak			5.7	4.3			3.4	4.5
impressive	- dull								
calm	- tense							2.1	3.2
total middle-range value		4.5	5.1	5.7	4.1			2.9	3.9

$p < .05$ (t-test)